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ABSTRACT

This study investigated children's sex biased attitudes as a function of the sex, age, and race of the child as well as a geographical-SES factor. Two attitudes were measured on a 55-item questionnaire: Sex Pride (attributing positive characteristics to a child of the same sex) and Sex Prejudice (attributing negative characteristics to a child of the other sex). Subjects were 1,169 children (513 black, 656 white) in grades 2 and 5, who were taken from either a lower-middle, upper-lower class urban or a suburban community. Gender was divided fairly equally. The children were tested in their schools, with examiner race varying equally at each grade level. Results indicated that all children tended to select children of the same sex for the positive attributes, but that both boys and girls selected boys for the negative attributes. Although all Sex Pride scores decreased with age, this was most exaggerated for the girls from a lower-middle, upper-lower class urban environment. (Author/SB)

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Sex Bias in Children

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This study investigated children's sex biased attitudes as a function of the sex, age, and race of the child as well as a geographical-SES factor. Two attitudes were measured: Sex Pride (attributing positive characteristics to a child of the same sex) and Sex Prejudice (attributing negative characteristics to a child of the other sex). Results indicated that all children tended to select children of the same sex for the positive attributes, but that both boys and girls selected boys for the negative attributes. Although all Sex Pride scores decreased with age, this was most exaggerated for the girls from a lower-middle, upper-lower class urban environment.

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The increasing concern for the way in which sex role expectations and sex stereotypes are communicated has prompted many investigators to look at the schools, and what has aptly been labelled their "institutional sexism". The school is a very special environment for the child. Children spend a major portion of their lives in school and the subtle (and not so subtle) communication which occurs in school has been held accountable for the transmitting of sex stereotypes. Schools have often been referred to as "female havens". Not only are they generally female dominated, but they have been accused of stressing so called "feminine" characteristics (eg. obedience, docility). Thus, the claim is, schools are designed more for girls than for boys. The expectations are such that girls can feel comfortable in schools and conform to the demands, whereas boys are confronted with conflicts. That is, they are chastised for the "boys will be boys" behaviors, which often results in underachievement and misbehavior (Sexton, 1969). If this be the case, one might anticipate that girls have a more positive concept of their sex's competencies in a school environment (both academic and nonacademic) than do boys. Is this indeed accurate? If so, for how long does it hold true?

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In additional to the obvious communications transmitted in the schools, a large number of not-so obvious messages are conveyed. The often segregated boy-girl activities are laden with values, as Carol Andreas points out (1971). For a

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girl to join the boys is often considered a privilege. The reverse is viewed as punishment. We have all witnessed the heckling of boys who step on the girls line by mistake. Margaret Mead, as early as 1949, noted what she referred to as "sexual rivalry". Boys learn very early that to loose to a girl is worse than to lose to a boy. Has so little changed!?

A finding relating directly to this is that documented by Levy and Stacy (1973). These researchers found that boys provide a more intense stimuli for the teacher. Thus, they receive more negative attention for infractions but at the same time they receive more positive attention for achievement. In view of this, we might anticipate that boys would have more extreme concepts of boys' competencies and incompetencies. That is, we might expect boys to judge other boys as worse than girls when assessing negative acts and better than girls when judging positive behaviors. Along with this, and the claims that schools are more geared to females, we might anticipate that the girls would have less extreme responses, but would judge other girls' competencies as high and incompetencies as low.

The purpose of this investigation is to assess the sex biased attitudes of elementary school boys and girls as it relates to other children, in several areas that are pertinent in a school environment, and to see whether these attitudes vary as a function of the sex of the child, the child's race and the location of the school (middle-class suburbia versus lower-class urban community). Thus, boys and girls were asked to assess whether a boy or a girl is to receive the credit for some positive attribute ("Sex Pride" score) or the blame for some negative attribute ("Sex Prejudice" score). The total "Sex Bias" score ("Sex Pride" plus "Sex Prejudice") is comprised of attributing positive behavior to a same-sex child and negative behavior to an other-sex child.

METHOD

Attitude Assessment

The children's sex biases regarding boy-girl competencies were assessed by the use of thirteen questions that were part of a series of 55 questions designed to assess children's racial attitudes (see Zalk and Katz, 1976). The items consisted of slides of boys and girls interacting in a school setting. Both black and white children were in the pictures although on any one slide the boy and girl were of the same race. The child was asked which of the two children in the slide should be credited with, or blamed for, a particular act or attribute. The booklet in which the child marked his or her answer had a sketch of the slide with the question next to it. The child merely had to put an "X" under the picture of the boy or girl they had selected. The question was read aloud as each slide was presented. A sample question appears in figure 1.

The thirteen questions divide into two attitudes. Five of the questions come under the category of what we call "sex pride". These items cover the areas of academic achievement, nonacademic achievement, and popularity. The other seven questions were termed "sex prejudice". They tap the topics of inferiority, disliked by other children, immoral behavior (eg. stealing), and behavior that would be judged bad by an adult (eg. which child is being sent to the principal's office?) The total score has been referred to as the Sex Bias indices (i.e. attributing positive traits to your own sex and negative traits to the other sex).

Subjects

The test was administered to 1169 children in grades two and five. The children were taken from two locations. One location was a lower-middle, upper-lower-class urban community in the Bronx, New York City. There is a large Hispanic population in the school which was not included

in the sample. The N.Y.C. sample was comprised of 158 black children and 132 white children. It divided fairly evenly according to gender. The second location was a suburban school district in New Jersey. 355 black children and 524 white children were tested and used for the study. Economically the community is distributed, ranging from lower-class to upper-class, with the majority representing the middle- and upper-middle-class. The race variable does not divide evenly between the social classes, with the black children tending to be over represented in the lower classes.

Procedure

The children were tested either in their class or another classroom in their school. In all grades the race of the examiner was varied, so that half the children at each grade level were tested by a black woman and half by a white woman. By tested, we mean that the examiner explained the instructions, read the questions and generally took charge of the testing. There was always a woman of the other race present in the class to assist with paper distributions and collections, etc. It should be noted that women were used for the testing. No men took part in the study. Although this is in keeping with the female dominated elementary schools, it would be a worthwhile study to see if men examiners would cause a change in the response patterns.

RESULTS

Scoring

The test was scored by giving one point every time the participating child chose a picture of a child of the same sex for the positive items and/or a child of the other sex for the negative items. Thus, the higher the score the higher the sex bias. Sex Pride scores, then, result from selecting a <u>same</u> sex child for the positive items, Sex Prejudice scores from selecting a child of the <u>other</u> sex for the negative items. The total of the two is the total Sex Bias score. The Sex Pride and Sex Prejudice scores

are not dependent on one another, so a child could be high or low in both, or high in one and low in the other. Mean scores were used (i.e. the score was divided by the number of questions), so that a score of 0.5 would indicate a non-sex bias response pattern. That would mean the children selected their own sex and the other sex for the positive and negative items an equal number of times.

Sex Pride versus Sex Prejudice

A repeated measures analysis of variance, Sex of Child X Age X Race of Child X Location X Score (Pride vs. Prejudice), was performed. Results revealed a number of interesting main effects and interactions. Thus, Sex of Child ($F=136.59$, $p < .001$), Age of Child ($F=34.19$, $p < .001$) and Score ($F=261.66$, $p < .001$) were significant. These findings indicated that females had higher overall scores than males (.70 and .56 respectively) and that the second graders scored higher than the fifth grade children (.66 and .59). These results become clearer when viewed within the significant interactions which will be discussed shortly. The other significant main effect, Score, revealed higher Sex Pride scores (.70) than Sex Prejudice scores (.56). In other words, children are more likely to attribute positive attributes to their own sex than they are to attribute negative attributes to the other sex.

In addition to the main effects, a number of significant interactions were found. Sex of Child X Age X Location ($F=4.71$, $p < .03$) was the only significant interaction that did not include the Score variable. The interesting finding here is that, although all scores decrease with age, this pattern was considerably more pronounced with the girls from the urban environment (see Table 1).

One of the more interesting findings is the significant Sex of Child X Score interaction ($F=231.29$, $p < .001$). As Table 2 indicates the difference between the boys' and the girls' sex biases appear on the Prejudice items, not the Pride items. Both boys and girls credit children of their

same sex with positive attributes or skills, but both boys and girls select boys for the negative attributes. Thus, the Prejudice items show high female scores and low males scores. This finding is consistent with the predicted hypothesis that boys will judge boys as better than girls on positive attributes, and worse than girls on the negative attributes, as a result of the more extreme reactions from their teachers on both good and bad behaviors. Similarly, the overall positive sex biases expressed by the girls is consistent with the hypothesis that the schools are "female oriented".

The Age X Score interaction ($F=5.09$, $p < .03$) indicates that although both Pride and Prejudice scores decrease with age, this is more exaggerated with the Pride scores (see Table 2). What must be kept in mind, however, is that the Prejudice scores were closer to the mean of .5 to begin with, and thus, a smaller decrease would be anticipated.

In addition to the above, the four-way interaction, Sex X Age X Location X Score was significant ($F=4.20$, $p < .05$). Although most of the differences revealed in this interaction reaffirm findings cited previously, one particular pattern emerges which is worth noting. As the means in Table 1 reveal, there is a large decrease in Sex Pride scores from the second to the fifth grade for the girls from the urban environment. Thus, in the younger grade, these girls showed a considerably higher score on Sex Pride than any other group of children. By the fifth grade, they demonstrated the lowest Pride scores of the children tested.

Worth noting, is that in none of the analyses did the race of the child appear as a significant factor.

Discussion

The present study investigated the sex biases of children regarding the competencies of other children in a school setting. It was predicted that, if indeed the schools are

"feminized" institutions, girls would attribute positive skills and traits to other girls more often than they would to boys. (demonstrating a high Sex Pride score). This prediction was supported. Is this just good reality testing and are the girls merely reflecting accurately what is occurring in the classroom? This may be so, but it is not the perception that the boys hold. The boys tested were equally inclined to attribute positive skills and attributes (Sex Pride) to other boys, as the girls were to other girls. If schools discriminate against boys we would not expect this.

Given the positive feelings girls express about their competencies, we would anticipate high aspirations and continued success, unless a reverse trend occurs. This present study indicated that even within the narrow range from second to fifth grade, there was a large decrease in Sex Pride demonstrated by the girls from the urban environment. What occurs during those years to bring such a drastic change warrents further investigation.

Another question raised by this finding is: What social factors account for this difference in decreased Sex Pride scores between the girls from the urban and suburban settings? Do the girls from an urban environment merely reflect an earlier awareness of potential limitations imposed by sex prejudices and reinforced by economic realities? Perhaps they have a greater exposure to more blatant "macho" attitudes and "might makes right" philosophies often preached. It seems likely that girls from the suburban environment are spared this for awhile as they feel no lack of material things and perhaps see themselves as having greater control over their environment. Increased exposure to the Woman's Movement and/or different values expressed in school at the upper grades also offer explanations for the differences. Further study is required.

In contrast to the Sex Pride findings, both boys and girls were more inclined to attribute negative acts and attributes to boys. Once more, is this an accurate reflection of the classroom dynamics? Does it mirror feelings that

girls are only capable of being passive and submissive, whereas boys are more aggressive and destructive? Interestingly, this tendency decreases for the girls with age, but increases slightly for the boys with age.

Based on the findings documented by Levy and Stacy (1973), that boys present more intense stimuli for teachers than girls do (i.e. scolded more for rule infractions and praised more for achievements), it was predicted that boys would feel more positive about themselves on Pride items and more negative about themselves on Prejudice items. This prediction was supported by the present study. The girls, in contrast, demonstrated more consistent responding, selecting females for the positive acts and males for the negative acts.

Clearly, the issue of sex biases in children is a complicated phenomenon and the many factors contributing to these attitudes have barely been tapped. This present study indicates that attitudes regarding children's perceptions of boy vs. girl competencies are a function of the child's sex, age, and location and whether he or she is judging positive or negative attributes. Further research was indicated.

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Figure 1

Sample item from the children's
Sex Bias Attitudes Measure

One of these children was bad. The other child was told to take the bad child to the principal's office. Which child was bad?

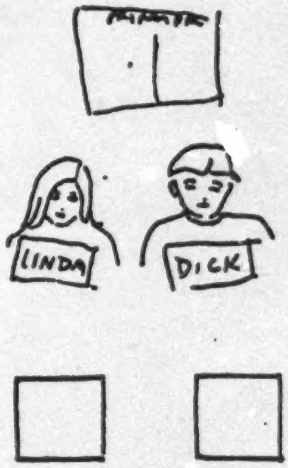

Table 1

Mean Sex Pride and Sex Prejudice scores as a function of the children's sex, age and location

Score	Location	Sex of Child			
		Male		Female	
		Grade		Grade	
		Second	Fifth	Second	Fifth
Sex Pride	Urban	0.71	0.68	0.80	0.63
	Suburban	0.74	0.64	0.72	0.67
Sex Prejudice	Urban	0.42	0.40	0.73	0.66
	Suburban	0.46	0.42	0.73	0.66
Across Score	Urban	0.57	0.54	0.76	0.64
	Suburban	0.60	0.53	0.72	0.66

Table 2

Mean Sex Pride and Sex Prejudice scores separately by sex of child and by age of child

	Sex of Child		Grade of Child	
Score	Males	Females	Second	Fifth
Sex Pride	0.69	0.70	0.74	0.65
Sex Prejudice	0.43	0.70	0.59	0.54